

## Birth Justice

There is a crisis in black women's maternal health care.

The U.S. spends more than any other developed country on health care, yet has the highest rate of maternal mortality of these countries. While maternal mortality rates have been declining globally, they have been steadily rising in the U.S. over the past two decades (Tikkanen, et al., 2020). Women of color in the U.S., especially Black women, are far more likely than white women to die in childbirth or experience childbirth-related complications. Black and Indigenous women are two to three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women (CDC, n.d.), even though pregnancy-related deaths in the U.S. are largely preventable (Tikkanen, et al., 2020).

The impacts are also seen for infants. Lack of access to adequate prenatal care, poverty, and systemic racism contribute to increased rates of preterm birth and with low birth weight among babies of color compared to white babies (Collins, et al., 2004). Black babies are also twice as likely to die in their first year of life as compared to the national average, followed closely by Indigenous babies (CDC, 2018). Moreover, Black women in the U.S. experience substantial levels of chronic stress throughout their lives as the result of systemic racism, which can in turn impact maternal and child health outcomes (Gavin, e.al., 2018). The cumulative effects of racism significantly impact the health of mothers, babies, families, and communities.

### Birth Justice

The Birth Justice movement “believes when birthing people recognize their innate power to make the best health decisions for themselves and their families during all stages of the pregnancy, birth, and the post-birth period, that power will have a transformational impact on their family and community” (<https://voicesforbirthjustice.org/birth-justice>). This movement, formed out of the long standing racial trauma, oppression, and injustice in the reproductive health system, promotes access to culturally sensitive care, breastfeeding support, midwife and doula care, and other maternal supports for women of color (<https://voicesforbirthjustice.org/birth-justice>).

### Strategies for Advancing the Birth Justice Movement

The Birth Justice Fund (Groundswell Fund, 2020) outlines a set of strategies that communities can explore when advancing the Birth Justice Movement:

- 1. Resourcing Transformative Models of Care:** Supporting the BIPOC birthing workforce in identifying, developing, and implementing innovative care models for women of color.
- 2. Supporting the Pipeline of Birth Workers of Color:** Leveraging grassroots organizations that support people of color in joining and thriving in the perinatal workforce; diversifying the birthing workforce; and ensuring that BIPOC providers have a voice in the medical system.
- 3. Building Power and Advocating for Systemic Change:** Supporting advocacy and grassroots organizing to promote a birth justice agenda at local, state, and national levels, including Medicaid coverage for doula care.

## Additional References

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